

# Stretching

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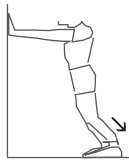
Incorporating a stretching routine into your workouts will reduce muscle soreness, prevent injury and improve triathlon performance. A good and consistent stretching program can keep you injury free. Stretching is the most important thing you can do to protect your body from the rigors of training. That said, you should be careful about how you stretch. If not done properly, stretching can actually cause injury rather than prevent it.

Rule number one in stretching: do not bounce. It's a common mistake, but bouncing risks pulling or tearing the muscle you're trying to stretch and relax. Muscles must be stretched gradually. If a stretch is applied too quickly, the muscle responds with a strong contraction, increasing tension. If the stretch is applied slowly, however, this contraction reflex is avoided, muscle tension falls, and you may stretch the muscle further. The lesson here: stretch slowly and hold the stretch for 30 to 40 seconds.

NEVER stretch before a work-out. It is best to do this after work-outs, since "warm" muscles stretch more easily. Do not stretch beyond the point where you begin to feel tightness in the muscle. Do not push through muscle resistance, and never stretch to the point of discomfort or pain.

A drink and 5 – 10 minutes of stretching, is the best way to wind down from a work-out.

Below are just a few stretches you can do, after your work-outs.



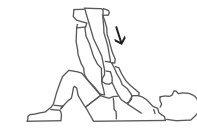
### Wall Push-up

Stand about three feet from a wall, feet at shoulder width and flat on the ground. Put your hands on the wall with your arms straight for support. Lean your hips forward and bend your knees slightly to stretch your calves.



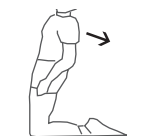
### Back Scratch

Grab your elbow with the opposite hand and gently push the elbow up and across your body until your hand reaches down to "scratch" your back. Gently push on your elbow to guide your hand down your back as far as it will comfortably go, stretching your triceps and shoulders. Stretch both arms.



### Hamstring Stretch

Lie down with one leg straight up in the air, the other bent with foot flat on the ground. Loop a towel over the arch of the lifted foot, and gently pull on the towel as you push against it with your foot. Push only to the point where your muscles contracts. Stretch both legs.



### Quadriceps Stretch

Kneel on your knees (without resting back on your heels). Lean back with your body erect and your arms to the side. Hold for 15 seconds.